

VZCZCXRO6696
RR RUEHRG
DE RUEHBU #0961 1961918
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 141918Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1524
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 1780
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1823
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 5217
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2323
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 1111
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 0170
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 2461
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 3729
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000961

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. Fourth Fleet Stirs Concern in Argentina

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Argentine government officials expressed serious concern about the U.S. Fourth Fleet last week, but were reassured by Assistant Secretary Shannon and other U.S. messages. GoA concern had been fed by assertions made by President Chavez at the Mercosur Summit held June 30-July 1 in Tucuman, Argentina, but were apparently driven home by Brazilian President Lula's expressions of concern. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) On July 9, an informal advisor to Argentine Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez told Ambassador that President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) was very concerned about the creation of the U.S. Fourth Fleet. He said Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had ranted and raved about the dangers and intentions of the U.S. fleet at the last Mercosur Summit held in Tucuman, Argentina July 1, including claims that the fleet contained the same ship inventory as our fleet in the Persian Gulf, that the U.S. intended to enter hemispheric rivers and territorial waters, and that the fleet was formed to gain control of natural resources such as oil in Venezuela and now in Brazil. The Ambassador gave the advisor U.S. background notes on the Fourth Fleet, the interview on the fleet which Admiral Stavridis had given while visiting Argentina and an op-ed which Ambassador Sobel had just published in Brazil. The advisor passed them that same day to GoA Cabinet Chief Fernandez, who reportedly shared some of the material with President Fernandez de Kirchner. Post public affairs officer also arranged to place in the July 10 edition of center-right daily La Nacion an op-ed by Admiral Stavridis on the Fourth Fleet.

¶3. (SBU) However, on July 8, Argentine Vice Foreign Minister Victorio Taccetti told the Argentine press that the government would use the July 10-11 visit of Assistant Secretary Shannon to raise its worries about the fleet. The issue was carried prominently in local media. Taccetti subsequently told the Ambassador that he had been ordered to express this concern and that the government was raising the issue, not because Chavez raised it, but because Lula had made a strong pitch in Tucuman about the danger of the fleet's formation. Ariel Basteiro, a Kirchner-allied socialist member of the Chamber of Deputies, reportedly introduced a draft resolution criticizing the Fourth Fleet. (Post is seeking a meeting with Basteiro to brief him.)

¶4. (SBU) Assistant Secretary Shannon subsequently explained to President Fernandez de Kirchner, Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez, Foreign Minister Taiana, and others (septels) the U.S. rationale and the facts about the Fourth Fleet's mission and composition. All appeared to accept the explanations. A/S Shannon also discussed the issues extensively with the press, and his remarks were given wide coverage. No GOA sources offered differing accounts or expressed

continuing worries about the fleet.

Comment

15. (SBU) While we cannot assure there will not be further critical commentary or reporting on the Fourth fleet, we clearly did good by our cause in responding rapidly and authoritatively to fears being kindled by Lula and Chavez. One top Foreign Ministry official told the Ambassador that he thought Lula was trying to use this concern to rally folk around his South American Defense council initiative. Another Argentine commented that he was struck by the effectiveness of our communications and the degree of willingness to accept our explanations: "A couple of years ago you would have had a few pro-government leftists out in the streets protesting the Fourth Fleet, instead you had Shannon covered in all the papers. That is a change." End Comment.

WAYNE